For File

# Drake Navigators Guild

2605 Waverley Street
Palo Alto, California 94306
March 11, 1977

Honorable Cecil Andrus
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

May I appeal for your support in a matter of National and International historical significance that has bedeviled Pacific Coast history for more than a century and which will be of prime interest on the occasion of its 400th anniversary in 1979. That is the landing place in California of Sir Francis Drake who named that land Nova Albion and claimed it for Queen Elizabeth I as attested by the enclosed replica of his Plate of Brass left to mark the claim. We seek to have this site, which is located in the Point Reyes National Seashore, declared a National Historical Landmark. I am also writing to President Carter for his consideration in this matter.

We have repeatedly appealed to the National Park Service for a hearing to evaluate our findings with the view of recommending the site as a National Historical Landmark so that it may be appropriately incorporated into the park. Although our initial appeal was well received in 1964 by the Service, we have subsequently been denied a proper hearing. In view of the enormous effort that has been expended in identification of the site, the contributions of many people, its historical importance, and the so-called controversy that has raged over the site, we feel that there can be no question that a hearing by a diverse and impartial review committee is more than justified. If found acceptable, the Drake landing site will add immeasurable stature to the Point Reyes National Seashore.

The Drake Navigators Guild was formed in 1949 to bring together persons with an interest in this matter to cooperatively search for and identify the exact site of Drake's encampment and careening place. The Guild's chairman in this effort was Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, a man of unquestioned naval expertise and unimpeachable integrity. His interest was genuine and personal, and he stood firmly behind the Guild until his last days.

The landing site was discovered in 1952 at the mouth of the estuary adjoining Drakes Bay, a site since named by Admiral Nimitz as Drake's Cove. The temptation was strong to let the world know, but we were warned by him to be absolutely certain of our identification before releasing the discovery, and it was therefore not disclosed until 1956 when further research and field work proved beyond reasonable doubt that the site was correctly identified.

For your interest, I enclose a copy of a reprint of Admiral Nimitz's article, Drake's Cove, written by him in 1958 which briefly sums up the Guild's work to that date.

When the National Park Service acquired the Point Reyes National Seashore, we were concerned that this, and other historic sites there, be recognized and incorporated into the park. Therefore, in 1964 Admiral Nimitz appealed to the then Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall, for a Study Group to evaluate the sites and recommend policy for their development and commemoration. (Letters enclosed.) A meeting was accordingly held shortly thereafter with the National Park Service Regional Director, Western Region, and his staff to set up guidelines for a study group, and we were requested to prepare documentation.

Unfortunately, the documentation proved a greater task than expected, Admiral Nimitz died not long thereafter, and the diverse and unbiased Study Group accorded in 1964 materialized in 1971 as only a three member committee recruited under contract to the National Park Service to evaluate the Guild's reports of findings on the Drake site. One member was known to be negatively disposed to a Drakes Bay site, and we asked in advance that he not be appointed to the evaluation committee. We were not permitted to know who was on the committee until after they had released their opinion, wrongly in our judgement. We were not given an opportunity to discuss their opinions in a hearing with them and the Service, and there was no field inspection of the site with us. Our subsequent appeals for a hearing have been denied. (Correspondence enclosed.)

Therefore, we appeal to you to create an appropriate Study Group, or panel of unbiased authorities in several fields of knowledge to review and render a decision on the Drake landing site in an open hearing. Their decision, if favorable to Drake's Cove, may then enable your Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments to recommend to you that the site be designated as a National Historic Landmark.

The timeliness of the long due recognition of the Drakes Bay-Drake's Cove site is dramatized by the fact that on August 5th of this year the City of Plymouth, England, will commemorate the 400th anniversary of Drake's voyage around the world on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee visit to that city. A delegation from California's Sir Francis Drake Commission, of which I am a member, is invited to participate in the festivities. It is expected that in 1979 a member of the Royal Family and a delegation from Plymouth will visit California to participate in commemorative celebrations of Drake's landing here.

In 1971 the first copies of the Guild's report of findings relating to Drake's landing at Drakes Bay to go to England were carried over on the Queen's yacht, BRITANNIA, when it passed through San Francisco enroute to British Columbia's Centennial celebrations. (Correspondence enclosed.)

In view of all of the above, we request that you use your influence to further the action that needs to be taken to resolve the Drake landing site question.

Very truly yours,

Raymond Aker

Raymond Aker, President
Drake Navigators Guild

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